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New York

THEATRE CRITICS'

Reviews

1943

INDEX

Stage Play	Pages
All for All	271, 272, 273
*Another Love Story	260, 261, 262
Apology	351, 352, 353
Artists and Models	239, 240, 241, 242
Ask My Friend Sandy	378, 379, 380
Barber Had Two Sons (The)	383, 384, 385
Blossom Time	286, 287, 288
Boy Meets Girl	316, 317
Bright Lights of 1944	276, 277, 278
*Carmen Jones	207, 208, 209
Chauve Souris 1943	298, 299, 300
*Connecticut Yankee (A)	219, 220, 221, 222
Counterattack	380, 381, 382
Dark Eyes	390, 391, 392
*Early to Bed	314, 315, 316
Family (The)	344, 345, 346
†Feathers in a Gale	192, 193, 194
First Million (The)	330, 331, 332
For Your Pleasure	374, 375, 376
Get Away Old Man	212, 213, 214
Goodbye Again	234
Hairpin Harmony	269, 270
*Harviet	364, 365, 366
I'll Take the High Road	232, 233, 234
Innocent Voyage (The)	224, 225, 226
*Kiss and Tell	356, 357, 358
Lady, Behave!	222, 223, 224
Land of Fame	274, 275, 276
Laugh Time	284, 285, 286
†*Listen, Professor	190, 191, 192
*Lovers and Friends	210, 211, 212
Manhattan Nocturne	246, 247, 248
Men in Shadow	360, 361, 362
*Merry Widow (The)	301, 302, 303

Stage Play	Pages
Milky Way (The)	317
Moon Vine (The)	372, 373, 374
Murder Without Crime	293, 294, 295
My Dear Public	281, 282, 283
Naked Genius (The)	253, 254, 255
New Life (A)	279, 280, 281
Nine Girls	393, 394, 395
*Oklahoma	341, 342, 343
*One Touch of Venus	264, 265, 266
*Othello	256, 257, 258
*Outrageous Fortune	237, 238, 239
Patriots (The)	385, 386, 387, 388
Petrified Forest (The)	242
*Pillar to Post	197, 198, 199
Richard III	348, 349, 350
Run Little Chillun	296, 297, 298
Slightly Married	248, 248, 250
Snark Was a Boojum (The)	288, 289, 290
*Something for the Boys	398, 399, 400
Sons and Soldiers	325, 326, 327
Student Prince (The)	320, 321, 322
This Rock	369, 370, 371
Those Endearing Young Charms	318, 319, 320
*Three's a Family	228, 329, 330
*Tomorrow the World	334, 335, 336
Try and Get It	306, 307, 308
*Two Mrs. Carrolls (The)	304, 305, 306
Vagabond King (The)	311, 312, 313
*Victory Belles	244, 245, 246
*Voice of the Turtle (The)	199, 200, 201
*What's Up	229, 230, 231
*Winged Victory	216, 217, 218, 219
World's Full of Girls (The)	202, 203, 204
*Ziegfeld Follies	338, 339, 340

PRODUCTIONS CONTINUING

Reviews appeared in 1942 CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS

Stage Play	Pages
*Doughgirls (The)	124, 125, 126
*Janie	244, 245, 246
*Rosalinda	187, 188, 189

Reviews appeared in 1941 CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS

Stage Play	Pages
*Angel Street	182, 183, 184, 185
*Arsenic and Old Lace	417, 418, 419, 420
*Life With Father	489, 490, 491

*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of December 27, 1943.
†*"Feathers in a Gale" opened Tuesday, December 21st, at the Music Box Theatre.*
†*"Listen, Professor" opened Wednesday, December 22nd, at the Forrest Theatre.*

THEATRE CRITICS' REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Theater Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"Listen, Professor"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 23, 1943

'Listen, Professor' an Amiable Comedy Out of Soviet Russia

By JOHN CHAPMAN

WHEN Milton Baron, Jean Muir and Toni Ward planned their production of "Listen, Professor," they purposely made no particular point of the fact that the comedy is a Soviet job—that it was written in and about the Russia of 1936.

They were afraid, I am told, that this detail might put the wrong emphasis on a simple little play, and set people a-hunting Communist doctrines in it. They were needlessly cautious, for "Listen, Professor," which was presented last night at the Forrest Theatre, is no more than friendly, engaging and human. If it is Communist propaganda to show that, in Russia, people can be gentle and affectionate and that children are still children, then I'm for it, and must congratulate Peggy Phillips on a good job.

Peggy Phillips is a young theatrical press agent who, yearning to become a playwright, adapted a translation of something by one Alexander Afinogenov. I have no notion of what the original was like, but as it appeared last night at the Forrest it is most pleasant. It has no great dramatic highlights and the story isn't big enough to sweep you off your feet, but it has the virtue of getting one interested in a number of characters who seem quite natural and therefore very real.

An Old Man Comes Alive

The professor of the comedy's title is Dudley Digges, who plays a puttery old fellow whose sloppily dressed body is buried in a big library and whose mind is buried in the Seventh Century. To his house comes, unbidden, his 15-year-old granddaughter. To his house also come various others—school children, a gay young engineer, a pretty music teacher, a rakish doctor.

The granddaughter first, then the others, begin to break into the old boy's consciousness—and into each other's. Before the play is over the professor has stopped being a hermit and has become aware of the time he is living in and of the people around him. He finds both the time and the people very good.

What makes the play enjoyable is not so much its plot, which is slight, but the fact that, at one time or another, all of the characters react against each other. Whether it is two of the children talking, or a child and a grownup, or two grownups, each is making some adjustment to the other. This makes for solidness of characters, and that is a playwright's prime job.

What, further, makes for enjoyment is the acting, which is from good to excellent. Mr. Digges does a thorough job of being a bookish old man, although I wish he wouldn't use quite so often a graybeard's trick of wetting the lower lip. As the granddaughter, Susan Robinson is appealing, and a lad named Michael Dreyfuss is immensely funny as a solemn, windy, cocksure but basically boyish son of the Soviet.

Direction by Meisner

Martin Blaine, as the gay young engineer, cleverly manages to be hearty without being forced; Frances Reid, as the music teacher with whom the engineer is in love, is attractive and intelligent. Viola Frayne has a last-minute scene as the mother of the granddaughter who comes back to claim her child and runs into firm opposition, including the opposition of the school children's "collective." Virginia Farmer warmly plays the professor's old maidservant, and all the others are quite acceptable.

Sanford Meisner has directed the players with insight, and the library setting, by Howard Bay, seems just right. "Listen, Professor" is unpretentious and may not therefore be a whooping smash hit, but it is a worthy, decent and dignified addition to Broadway's drama list.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
December 23, 1943

'Listen, Professor' At Forrest Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

IF Peggy Phillips' adaptation entitled "Listen, Professor" — it is really a rearrangement of J. J. Robins' translation of Alexander Afinogenov's "Mashenka," exposed for the first time in America a year ago at Harvard—is a sample of what the bright new postwar world is going to give us in the shape of drama, God help the American theatre. Hereabouts, this sort of thing went out with Coolidge.

Even as snappy a new title as "Listen, Professor" doesn't disguise the fact that "Mashenka" is a trite and tiresome theatrical concoction made up of a bit of this, a bit of that and a bit of everything, ranging from "Cinderella" to "Daddy Long Legs," from "Pollyanna" to "Topaze."

Last night, in the Forrest Theatre, which is still trying to swab "Tobacco Road" from off its stage, "Listen, Professor" reminded me most of "Topaze." For, like that translation from the French, this translation from the Russian gives an elderly actor a chance to stay up all evening and act his heart out. If you think Teacher Topaz had his troubles, wait until you hear about the troubles of Professor Okayemov.

Old Fogeyvitch

In "Listen, Professor!"—to continue to call "Mashenka" by its stream-lined Forty-ninth Street title—the plot gets all mixed up with the scenery, which is bookish, the direction, which is uncertain, and the dialogue, which is on the dull side. Listening carefully, however, I gather that the Russian young folks are ganging up on a Russian old-folk who knows more about life than all of them put together.

But you know as well as I know the sort of doddering old fogy Old Fogy Professor Vassily Okayemov is. Last night, at the Forrest, he doddered on the stage, doddered off the stage and doddered among his books, making my memories of Jeeter Lester look like a youngster in short trousers.

The action, which, such as it is, takes place in the Old Fogy's home in Moscow along about 1936, leads up to the exciting fact that, after three acts and twice that number of scenes, the Old Fogy's daughter comes back home to live.A little child having led them, everything is for the best in the most obvious of all Moscow worlds. Once again, Vera's heart belongs to daddy.

* * *

Digges Dodders

Dudley Digges most certainly has a field day as Professor Vassily Okayemov. He does a good job, too, and it was in me all evening to wish that he had the sort of material Frank Morgan had in "Topaze." I don't know why the one role keeps reminding me of the other. But it does! Maybe it's the pleasure a professional first-nighter gets in seeing a sterling old actor have a sterling on-stage time.

Every actor over fifty dearly loves to dodder. And Dudley Digges is no exception! As a dodderer he is right out of the doddering top drawer, messing up his hair, messing up his papers, messing up his family with a relish that is so non-regional it has nothing in particular to do with Russia. I hope "Listen, Professor!" lasts a while, because of Mr. Digges.

Here's a good word for Anne Marie Macaulay as Galya Chikova, right out of Moscow's Park of Culture, Switchbacks and Refinement. And Michael Dreyfuss, a boyish bookworm who, in the play, burrowed through 280 books last year and who hopes—God help him!—to ruin at least 300 in the year that is to come . . . It's the audience that loses out on the listening at the Forrest. Unlike the professor, it has nothing much to listen to.

NEW YORK TIMES
December 23, 1943

Dudley Digges, Broadway's Favorite Grandfather, Plays the Role Again in 'Listen, Professor!' at the Forrest

By LEWIS NICHOLS

PEGGY PHILLIPS is in her twenties. For some years as a Broadway press agent she has been a welcome harbinger of other people's plays. Last evening one of her own went on at the Forrest Theatre when Milton Baron and associates offered "Listen, Professor!" which she adapted from a translation from the Russian. There is enough in it to suggest that perhaps in her next attempt or so she will be able to retire from the role of harbinger, but there is not enough to say she will do it this time. While moments of Miss Phillips' play have real feeling, the general air supplied by the evening falls somewhat short of the standards demanded by a winter's night off Times Square.

The fault lies in greater part in the basic story, which was written by the late Alexander Afinogenov and was produced in Russia under the title of "Mashenka" in 1939. A character study of a crochety old man who is brought back into the light of a modern world by his granddaughter, it lacks action as such. What it lacks even more are the little touches which could set the characters apart from those in other plays about old men and their grandchildren. Some of the people who wander across the Forrest's stage seem a little like parodies of stock figures, and just as "Listen, Professor!" appears about to settle down, they come on to destroy what might be good scenes.

Dudley Digges, who is getting to be Broadway's favorite grandfather, plays the part of the aged, withdrawn scholar, although he does not play it so well as he did the Gramps of "On Borrowed Time." Susan Robinson is the grandchild, and gives a sincere and natural performance in the role of a young lady of 15. Among the elders in the cast, Martin Blaine and Frances Reid supply what could be called the love interest—brought into the play willy-nilly—and Peter Fernandez has a strange sort of part as a villain. Among the younger generation, Peggy Allardice and Anne Marie Macaulay are cheerfully believable as friends of the grandchild.

The action of the play is set in Moscow, in 1936, when the scholar's home is invaded by his dead son's daughter, sent there by her mother who wished to marry again. Being 15, she thinks she is in love with a young friend of the professor who, in turn, loves an opera singer living downstairs. Where "Listen, Professor!" really falls apart is when the family doctor, who has the evil eye for women, also spots the singer and turns the play into the makings of a beer-hall melodrama. When Miss Phillips is writing of the relationship between the first and third generations, she is at her best. Unfortunately there is more to the play than that, and the parts that are not of the best outnumber those that are.

"Listen, Professor"

NEW YORK POST
December 23, 1943

"Listen, Professor!" Opens At Forrest Theatre

By EARL WILSON
(Pinch-Hitting for Wilella Waldorf)

MISS PEGGY PHILLIPS, a cheerful, competent, 27-year-old Broadway press agent, used to be found somewhere in a publicity office in the depths of the Russian Pavilion at the World's Fair.

Last night an amusing, diverting play, "Listen, Professor!", which she adapted from a play of the late Alexander Afinegenov, a Soviet Union playwright, opened at the Forrest. It was all to her credit. You can sit through this one without fidgeting and leave with a nice, warm feeling for middle-class Russians, especially their bright, forward-looking kids. It's without social significance, without hidden propaganda, without grand dukes, without caviar.

Dudley Digges plays Prof. Vassily Okayemov, a bearded savant largely interested in his research into the seventh century, and then some youngsters, members of a Moscow collective back in 1936, undertake to modernize him. They get the old boy, as though you didn't know.

But naturally,not till the last act. Masha, his granddaughter, played by Susan Robinson, appearing in her first Broadway play, is cast off by her mother, who sends her to the professor. When her mother gets sensible and wants to take daughter back, the Young Pioneers tell the patriarchial professor in some startlingly adult and erudite speeches that he can't let her go. This is a pleasant conflict with the well-chosen children, Michael Dreyfuss, Peggy Allardice and Anne Marie Macaulay, playing it handsomely.

The wayward mama is Viola Frayne, who is just a rumor until the last act, and who is yanked into the story just when you think all the complications are solved and wonder how they're going to keep the play from ending right there at about 10:25.

A Russian wolf similar to the Broadway and Hollywood type, played by Alexander Clark, tries to break up the running love story of a Russian engineer (Martin Blaine) and a singing teacher (pretty Frances Reid) but suffers the disappointment that all wolves suffer—at least in Broadway plays.

Happily, Sanford Meisner, the director, has put it all in English, with no Gregory Ratoff accents.

'LISTEN, PROFESSOR!'

Play by Alexander Afinogenov; adapted by Peggy Phillips; staged by Sanford Meisner; setting by Howard Bay; costumes by Lucinda Ballard; presented by Milton Baron, in association with Jean Muir and Toni Ward, at the Forrest Theater Wednesday, December 22, 1943. The cast:

Anya	Virginia Farmer
Professor Vassily Okayemov	Dudley Digges
Masha	Susan Robinson
Leonid Karayev	Martin Blaine
Nina Alexandrovna	Frances Reid
Victor Tumansky	Peter Fernandez
Dr. Pavel Tumansky	Alexander Clark
Senya Marshak	Michael Dreyfuss
Lyolya Spiripa	Peggy Allardice
Galya Chikova	Anne Marie Macaulay
Vera	Viola Frayne

NEW YORK SUN
December 23, 1943

'Listen, Professor!' Opens at the Forrest It's Rambling and Indecisive

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE drama had its troubles again last night and this time with a comedy called "Listen, Professor!" which brings a swarm of children and Dudley Digges, in the role of the testy old Vassily Okayemov, together upon the stage of the Forrest Theater. There are some warming chuckles in this piece, and at the very beginning I had hopes for it, but it wanders indecisively through three acts and falls pretty steadily as a play.

Peggy Phillips, a bustling and efficient Broadway press agent, breaks loose as a playwright with "Listen, Professor." The comedy is taken from the original of the late Alexander Afinogenov, who was a leading dramatist of the Soviet Union at the time of his death from a Nazi bomb in 1941. Somewhere in the process of translation and adaptation the Afinogenov original has undoubtedly lost a great deal of its mood and substance.

"Listen, Professor" as revealed last night at the Forrest, has a vexing way of turning every now and then to the problems of its subsidiary characters, none of whom are clearly defined. There are plots and sub-plots and the main story is always getting out of hand.

Mr. Digges, giving a now familiar characterization, but doing it with great relish, is a learned and crabbed fellow who has been around for quite a time. He did his early reading by candlelight, and he knew the Russia that used to be, before there was an electric light or an automobile. To his musty old house, in the year of 1936, comes his granddaughter, her mother having gone into a new marriage. She and her young school friends represent the new Russia; the professor lives in the dreamy past. But by the close of the third act little Masha and the fumbling old Vassily have become so attached to each other that she refuses to leave when her mother comes to reclaim her.

The children of this story in all their outspoken modernity do a lot of talking to the professor and he seems quite a receptive pupil, but I didn't find him greatly changed at the finish; he is merely having a better time. There is an attractive performance from Susan Robinson as Masha and properly forthright and pleasing are the other children.

In the adult roles, I found a lot of vitality in the playing of Frances Reid and Martin Blaine, although their characters are vague and really don't seem to have a place in the play at all. Miss Reid is pretty and forceful and is to be remembered from the original production of "The Patriots." You will be hearing from her again.

"Listen, Professor" is nicely costumed. There is an extraordinarily effective atmospheric setting by Howard Bay. Milton Baron makes the presentation, in association with Jean Muir and Toni Ward. J. J. Robbins did the translation from the Russian.

The Forrest Theater is still looking for a good play. "Listen, Professor" is faltering and insufficient.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
December 23, 1943

Listen, Professor! a Work of Wit from Russia

By BURTON RASCOE

IF THE public taste is all it should be and what I think it is, the rush to buy tickets for Listen, Professor! will start right away, and the play will have a phenomenal run; for it is utterly delightful, pulse-quickening and richly humorous in the deepest sense of the word. Moreover, it contains a provocative and inspiriting revaluation of values. It opened at the Forrest last night before an agreeably surprised and justifiably enthusiastic audience.

The play is an adaptation by Peggy Phillips of a translation by J. J. Robbins of a play by Alexander Afinegenov—one of the most popular of the Soviet playwrights, who was killed by a Nazi bomb in Moscow in 1941, while acting as a liaison officer between American newspaper correspondents and the Soviet Bureau of Information. (His wife was an American; he wrote and spoke English fluently.)

If Listen Professor! is subtle Communist propaganda, I am all for it and the more the better. Furthermore, if the spirit of this play is indicative of the true spirit of peacetime Soviet's younger generation, then the play should shake up a lot of our American complaisances about the proper foundations for happy domestic relationships.

Family Album Quickened

A sort of Soviet Life with Grandfather, it shows, by implication, the essential horror of the American, Life with Father—a horror delightfully obscured by the comicality of a family album brought to life and made at once sentimental and grotesque. Even if Listen, Professor! is an idealization of contemporary Russian life, they are ideals we could use quite a lot of. In fact, the play is animated by a sense of values which is very like that of the best ideals of American life—ideals we sort of began to lost track of about 1870—plus a persuasive ideal of co-operation while, at the same time, perserving the sanctity of the individual.

Dudley Digges, as a professor of paleontology who has lived through 10 wars and a revolution, represents the best (and to some extent) the worst of old Russia. He is, at bottom, a vain, egotistic, intransigent tyrant, for all his aspect of benevolence, otherworldliness and scholarly preoccupation with the 7th Century. His concepts of human values belong to the Dark Ages, like his knowledge; at heart he has the ancient Oriental concept of women as soulless mere instruments of men when not active instruments of evil, tending to lead man not upward and onward but down and away from the true path of self-fulfillment. Believing he knows unerringly what that true path is, he has tried to wreck the married life and career of his son and threatens to crash the finer instincts of his granddaughter—in the worst and most insidious of ways, that of regulating their lives for them "for their own good."

The New And Old

For all that, Professor Okayemov is a sweet old soul, pliable enough, when properly approached and brought to a new understanding of life by affectionate attention and subtle persuasion. In the end he becomes reconciled to the daughter-in-law whom he had unreasonably hated; and at a New Year's Eve celebration, after he has been toasted as representative of the best of old Russia, he proposes a toast to the best of the new Russia and to the merger of the two.

How this happy eventuality is arrived at, through hazards and misunderstandings, is the substance of this very Dickensian story of life under the Soviet. A cast of eleven is involved, but so pertinent is each to the development of the story that it seems like twice as many. Every character is strongly individualized, and convincing in speech and action, and at least three of them (besides Mr. Digges and Viola Frayne) are positively superb—Susan Robinson, as the professor's grandchild; Peter Fernandez, as the adolescent who gets off on the wrong foot through the bad example of his brilliant but philandering father but is straightened out into a fine boy by his progressive young companions; and Michael Dreyfuss, a special delight with his characterization of a Soviet equivalent of Johnny Boston Beans.

This play is a thing of beauty which you shouldn't miss. . . . There is a love story in it, by the way, and a good one.

"Listen, Professor"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
December 23, 1943

A Quiet Night With Mr. Digges

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IN *Listen, Professor!* Peggy Phillips has adapted a Soviet play by Alexander Afinogenov, who was killed during a Nazi bombing. It is a peacetime play laid in 1936, and a very peaceful one as well—a gently humorous and sentimental tale about a withdrawn and crotchety old scholar whose granddaughter comes to live with him and reawakens his feeling for human beings. It is a familiar sort of story that has been told the whole world over, though the present account may surprise those who conceive of Soviet literature as always grim and realistic. It is indeed so very familiar a story—and so dangerously pretty a one—that everything depends on the charm and skill with which it is handled.

As it was presented last night, there was not enough of either. Howard Bay has evoked the proper mood with his warmly old-fashioned interior of the professor's study; Dudley Digges, adroit and ingratiating as always, makes a very sympathetic figure of the professor; and Miss Phillips has contrived some pleasant and amusing scenes. But the play as a whole achieves neither an atmosphere of quiet reality nor an accent of disarming sentiment—it is merely sweet and nice in a purely story-book fashion. Even more unhappily, it is quite short on incident and action.

All these shortcomings might have been less noticeable had *Listen, Professor!* received an expert production. First-rate direction and acting might have sustained a warmth and interest that are all too intermittent in the script itself. But aside from Mr. Digges, the cast fumbles its opportunities, and Mr. Meisner's direction fails to nail down the possibilities of several scenes. However conventionally drawn, the characters have their human enough moments; but these moments subside into very little. However lacking in flavor, the dialogue has none of the usual barnacles of a translation; but too much of it is delivered without any suggestion of personality. The three-cornered love story that forms the subplot seems the purest papier-mache. Some of the pleasanter scenes involve Masha and her schoolmates, one of whom, a precociously pompous lad, makes amusing copy. But even these scenes are never as diverting as they should be.

Mr. Digges is the play's real bright spot; but as the title makes plain, too many other people do the talking.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 23, 1943

Christmas Present

By HOWARD BARNES

THERE is more heart than structure in "Listen, Professor!" which opened at the Forrest Theater last night. The late Alexander Afinogenov must have cared deeply for the characters in his domestic drama. The emotional power comes through strongly in Peggy Phillips's adaptation of the original Russian work. It is heightened at every turn by the brilliant acting of Dudley Digges and an excellent supporting company. If the threads of personal drama which bind the piece together get snarled on occasion, it does not keep the play from being generally effective and frequently affecting.

• • •

Under Sanford Meisner's prepossessing direction, the stage of the Forrest is peopled with real and engaging figures in the offering. Chief of them are a testy old professor, well buried in the seventh century, and his forlorn granddaughter, who reluctantly invades the privacy of his Moscow study. He gets a liberal course in current events from the youngster, while she advances bravely into maturity, guided by his rather stuttering wisdom. There are several others involved in the proceedings, who lead the production off into confusing tangents. What matters is that the core of "Listen, Professor!" is solid and a burden of honest feeling is sustained right up to the final curtain.

• • •

It is when Digges and Susan Robinson, who plays the pig-tailed waif of the piece with great sincerity and awareness, are fencing across three generations and family feuds, that it establishes its dramatic quality most surely. The star gives an immaculate portrayal of the scholar who is yanked into the new world of the U.S.S.R. and finds it's rather delightful. Viola Frayne, as the child's mother, has tougher going with a sketchy and somewhat adventitious role, but she completes a pattern of shifting values which Afinogenov saw clearly and has expressed with considerable theatrical lucidity.

• • •

Subsidiary parts are handled expertly, even when they do not stick to the main line of the play. Martin Blaine is good as a mining engineer who does a lot to bring an old man and his little granddaughter together. Frances Reid is attractive as a music teacher, and Michael Dreyfuss and a couple of other small-fry performers add more comic touches to the action than one might have expected from stirpilings. Incidentally, Howard Bay has designed a striking and resourceful setting for the doings. They do not always add up to much in the way of dramatic construction in "Listen, Professor!" but they are calculated to engage your unfaltering attention and sometimes move you.

"Feathers in a Gale"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 22, 1943

'Feathers in a Gale' Breezeless Comedy About Cape Cod in 1804

By JOHN CHAPMAN

IN GENTLE contradiction of a turbulent title, "Feathers in a Gale" is a suspenseless little comedy about what Cape Codders did with penniless widows in 1804. What they did was put them up at a vendue—pronounced vandoo—and sell them off as house servants at three bucks up a head.

Arthur Hopkins and Martin Burton presented "Feathers" last night at the Music Box, and under the traditionally quiet direction of Mr. Hopkins everybody in the play is pleasant enough, but unexciting. As often happens in a one-set play, the things which might zip up the action if they were visible occur offstage. Thus, there's a storm at sea—indicated by a wind machine; and the vendue around which the plot turns is held in the wings.

There are three widows of seafaring men, making out for themselves in one house with the small aid of a Yankee hired man. One is oldish, one spinsterish, the third young and pretty. When their resources play out and the house is to be sold for debts, they are put up for sale—as housekeepers, if you can fancy that in this Century of the Common, or Dishwashing, Man.

The only thing that will save the ladies is for some gent to propose marriage to the youngest and prettiest and get all three out of hock. The parson of this town of Sesuit would like much to be the one, but he is slow about it, and in blows a free-talking, easy-minded sea captain who quite takes the girl's heart. But the captain is leery of getting land-bound, and not until he has to buy his lady at auction does he take any definite steps.

Miss Conklin Returns

Peggy Conklin, as the girl, is as fresh and saucy as she was in "Yes, My Darling Daughter." Her co-widows are Paula Trueman, who has little to do but look comically embarrassed once in a while, and Louise Lorimer, who is more the rock-ribbed New England type. The hired man, amiably acted as a character part by John F. Hamilton, bids in Miss Lorimer for $3 at the vendue.

I fancy that Pauline Jamerson and Reginald Lawrence, the authors, wrote their sea captain as a lusty, bellowing fellow. As he is played by Norman MacKay—and as Mr. MacKay is directed by Mr. Hopkins—the captain is a rather gentle fellow for the skipper of a Clipper. Harry Ellerbe is nicely earnest as the parson, and there are various townsfolk who are Yankee tintypes.

"Feathers in a Gale" won't make you sit up in your seat from excitement, or fall out of it from laughing—but it won't drive you out of it, either. And only one or two people in the whole layout talk like Calvin Coolidge or Herbert L. Swett, so things could have been grimmer.

The paneled New England set is by Raymond Sovey and the widow's weeds are by Aline Bernstein.

"Feathers in a Gale"

NEW YORK POST
December 22, 1943

"Feathers in a Gale" Opens at the Music Box

By WILELLA WALDORF

PAULINE JAMERSON and Reginald Lawrence have apparently been intrigued by an old custom prevalent around 1804 in certain backward portions of Cape Cod whereby the village selectmen auctioned off widows with no means of support.

"Feathers in a Gale," presented last night at the Music Box Theatre, concerns three widows about to be auctioned off, and their desperate but usually genteel efforts to hook a husband before the auction. Annabelle Hallock, a sea captain's daughter and a seaman's widow, is doing her best to capture Captain Seth Barnabas, just in from foreign parts, while keeping the Rev. David Thatcher dangling in case anything goes wrong.

In an over leisurely manner, the mild little story is coyly told against an attractive Cape Cod background by Raymond Sovey, with old-style costumes supplied by Aline Bernstein, and a cast headed by Peggy Conklin, Norman MacKay, Paula Trueman, Louise Lorimer, Harry Ellerbe and John F. Hamilton does much better by the play than it deserves.

Arthur Hopkins directed rather fussily, which is not surprising when you consider that "Feathers in a Gale" is very windy stuff. We found it quaint but soporific.

'FEATHERS IN A GALE'

"Feathers in a Gale," comedy by Pauline Jamerson and Reginald Lawrence; staged by Arthur Hopkins; setting by Raymond Sovey; costumes by Aline Bernstein; presented by Mr. Hopkins and Martin Burton at the Music Box Tuesday, December 21, 1943. The cast:

Matilda Phinney.....Louise Lorimer
Phoebe Fuller.....Paula Trueman
Zeb Hibbitt.....John F. Hamilton
Lucy Abner.....Zamah Cunningham
Annabelle Hallock.....Peggy Conklin
Rev. David Thatcher.....Harry Ellerbe
Capt. Seth Barnabas.....Norman MacKay
Felipe.....Stuart Brody
Josiah Abner.....Richard Garrick
Town Clerk.....John Robb
Captain Ebenezer.....Alexander Campbell
Abigail.....Aileen Poe
Mr. Otis.....Cyrus H. Staehle
Mr. Carey.....Edwin Cushman

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
December 22, 1943

Pretty Heavy For Feathers

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

FEATHERS IN A GALE is a comedy about some whaling widows on Cape Cod in 1804. The title is technically accurate, since a sure-enough gale blows up on the Cape during the course of Act II; but it is a decidedly tempestuous title in terms of the play. The play is unpretentious enough and even vaguely likeable; but far from a gale, hardly a breath of air ever seems to stir on the stage. With all the good will in the world, one can only report that *Feathers in a Gale* is almost stupefyingly dull.

To begin with, the authors have been tempted by one of those quaintly comic ideas that wiser men resist. It seems that in old New England days widows who had neither cash nor kin were auctioned off at something called a *vendue*. Well, Miss Jamerson and Mr. Lawrence have thought up three such widows—one of them coquettish and gay, one fluttery and coy, one hard-working and angular, and held the vendue over their heads for most of the evening. Pending the auction, the coquettish widow is courted by the town preacher, but gets into a tizzy (the dialogue is having its effect on me) over a romantic sea captain. The other two widows, like the audience, just wait and hope; and in the end everybody is tolerably well off.

Everybody except the authors, for the pretty piece of Americana they have dug up becomes a millstone round their neck. They try to be sprightly, but having very little to write about they merely become tedious. To keep things going, they have to fall back on such tired comic devices as a loquacious hired man and a foreign sailor who mistakes the widows' house for a brothel. There are mild jokes, too, about the inconstancy of seafaring men, and mild oaths of the era, such as "Godfrey's scissors!" Even at its best, *Feathers in a Gale* is tame as tea; and much oftener it is weak as water.

As the gay widow and the roving captain, Peggy Conklin and Norman MacKay offer as spirited performances as they can. Paula Trueman is properly fluttery as the coy widow, Louise Lorimer properly downright as the angular one, and Harry Ellerbe properly prim as the parson. Mr. Hopkins' direction is in no sense brisk.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 22, 1943

No Gale of Laughter

By HOWARD BARNES

THE authors of "Feathers in a Gale" have dug up an old Cape Cod custom and tried to build a play around it. The result is a quaint and languid comedy that hasn't enough laughter for one scene, let alone six. The widow's vendue, from which the action springs, is not nearly so amusingly archaic as the business of bundling in "The Pursuit of Happiness." The conceit has been handled clumsily in the script and it defies most of the efforts of a rather engaging company at the Music Box to make it entertaining. For all of Raymond Sovey's handsome early American setting and the 1804 costumes of Aline Bernstein, this Arthur Hopkins-Martin Burton production drags interminably.

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It is understandable that Pauline Jamerson and Reginald Lawrence thought they had a farcical springboard in the post-Revolutionary New England law which provided that widows should be sold at auction for a year's service so that they would not become charges on the community. It offered rich possibilities for period clowning. Unfortunately they have examined the plight of three bereft ladies in such a pedestrian fashion that it is almost impossible to give a hoot what happens to them. Even a more or less centripetal romance which finds a sea captain extricating the fairest of the trio from her predicament is no more than a faint breeze in "Feathers in a Gale."

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There is nothing quite as exasperating as a play which has all the professional accoutrements one has a right to expect in a Broadway production and then merely stands still. For all of two acts figures move around the stage of the Music Box, chatting and making their exits and entrances on cue, without even inspiring a bit of old Cape Cod color. Try as they may, Peggy Conklin, Louise Lorimer and Paula Trueman are no more than knowing actresses in costume. Miss Conklin has some arch business in the final stanza of the work which brings a bit of levity into the show, but she is never a plausible figure and she is rarely funny.

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Norman MacKay has rather a better time in the role of the sea dog who buys the girl he loves, when she turns down his proposal of marriage, but he is lucky in having less to do in "Feathers in a Gale" than the feminine principals. Harry Ellerbe plays a righteous, but right-thinking parson agreeably enough and there are good bits of acting by lesser members of the cast. The Hopkins staging is smooth. It has had very little of dramatic interest or amusement to handle.

NEW YORK TIMES
December 22, 1943

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Feathers in a Gale"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

THE Music Box, which used to tinkle with the sound of the revue and the sight of the star and garter, now is pursuing quite another muse. For last evening Arthur Hopkins and Martin Burton set upon its stage a comedy called "Feathers in a Gale," a comedy which is one of the slowest little comedies Forty-fifth Street has seen in a long time. If at the end of the evening the Music Box longed wistfully for the old days, it could not be blamed very much, for those days were far more exciting than the one fashioned by Pauline Jamerson and Reginald Lawrence.

The authors have built their play upon the old New England custom of putting into at least practical servitude the widows without money. Their widows are three, living together, all with hopes of getting married again and one actively going about it, first with the minister, then with a sea captain. No doubt there could be a play fashioned about the subject, just as there was about another custom in "The Pursuit of Happiness," but there also can be no doubt "Feathers in a Gale" is not that play.

As an evening in the theatre—let alone the Music Box—the comedy lacks speed, humor and for the most part natural dialogue. Its characters, save for the one widow who is ambitious, are not defined, and even that one becomes a definition of a character seen a good many times in the course of a season on Broadway. It was as though the authors pored over their histories of New England and then set out to produce a bit of Americana but ended by producing a caricature. In short, not a good play.

As is often the case, the players are considerably better than their play. Peggy Conklin, who reviewed the bundling situation in "The Pursuit of Happiness," is on hand as the youngest of the widows seeking to avoid servitude. She gives to the part a personal charm deserving far better. Louise Lorimer and Paula Trueman are the other ladies, and are good when the script doesn't make them chase around, and Norman MacKay is the visiting sea captain. There is a nice bit part by Stuart Brody as the mate of a ship. However, one of the brighter moments of the evening came from the balcony. Someone on the stage remarked, "Six hundred dollars is too much to pay for any woman," and from high above came a burst of applause. The cynic, no doubt, who had decided to remain and see how it all ended.